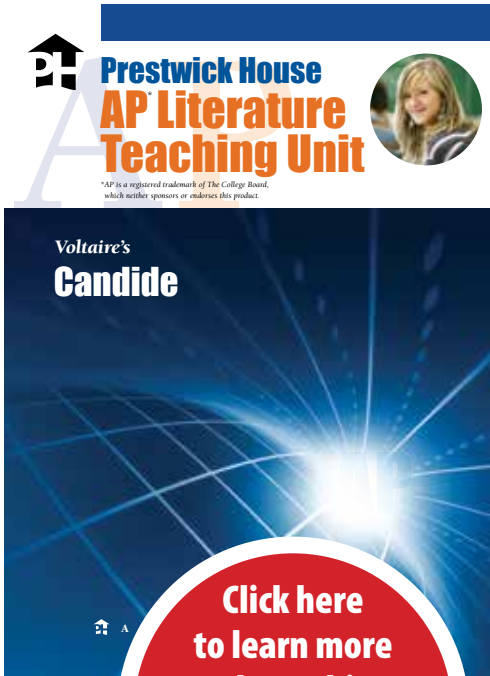




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Teaching Unit

Candide

by Voltaire

Written by Rebekah Lang



Prestwick House

Item No. 309130

Candide

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. explain how historical allusions affect the text.
2. analyze the text as a work of satire.
3. analyze the development of the text's primary philosophical arguments.
4. explain how the text addresses the problem of evil.
5. explain how the author's sentiment affects the novella's overall tone.
6. outline the plot, showing where the story conforms to and breaks from standard novella conventions.
7. evaluate the effectiveness of satire in communicating the author's message.
8. analyze symbols and motifs for meaning, purpose, and effectiveness.
9. identify each character by type (flat or round, static or dynamic, protagonist or antagonist, main or secondary, foil, etc.) and explain his/her effect on the text.
10. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
11. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

Introductory Lecture

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1480, the Spanish crown established the Inquisition, a tribunal that assessed the orthodoxy of converts to Catholicism and punished those who did not adhere closely enough to Catholic precepts. Soon after the Inquisition was established, royal decrees forced Jews and Muslims to leave Spain; some Jews and Muslims chose to convert to Catholicism rather than accept expulsion. The Inquisition closely watched these *conversos*, persecuting them if they took actions inconsistent with Catholic orthodoxy.

This atmosphere of religious persecution hangs heavily over *Candide*. The religious climate in Voltaire's France was probably shaped most directly by the Wars of Religion between French Calvinist Protestants (Huguenots) and French Roman Catholics that engulfed the country in the late 16th century. Though the 1598 Edict of Nantes offered Huguenots a measure of peace and equality under Catholic rule, the Edict was revoked in 1685, leading to the programmatic destruction of Protestant churches and attempts to convert Protestants to Catholicism by coercion. Protestants undertook a mass diaspora from France, and relations between Protestant countries and France became strained.

In 1755, just a few years before *Candide* was originally published, an earthquake destroyed the Portuguese city of Lisbon. This event forms the backdrop for chapters 5 and 6 and can reasonably be assumed to have formed a powerful obstacle to Voltaire's acceptance of divine providence in his own philosophical outlook. If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, how could he allow (or cause) such an event to occur? Voltaire examines this question throughout *Candide*.

By the time *Candide* was written, the Enlightenment was well under way. One of the most important texts of this period, Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, attempted to explain natural processes with observable evidence—a contrast to preceding ideas about the natural world, which mostly relied upon unobservable supernatural phenomena. Natural philosophy was not the only sphere in which religious beliefs and practices were questioned, however; some philosophers and ethicists rejected faith-based arguments concerning morality and ethical principles.

Gottfried Leibniz, however, was not one of these philosophers. In his *Théodicée*, Leibniz attempts to reconcile the existence of evil with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent God. The existence of evil within the universe, often referred to as “the problem of evil,” is perhaps most elegantly stated in a quotation often attributed to the Greek philosopher Epicurus:

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

Candide

Chapter 1

1. How does Voltaire use names to quickly reveal aspects of his characters?

2. From what narrative point of view is the story told?

3. What topics are introduced into this satire in this first chapter?

4. What logical fallacy does Pangloss make in his argument for Optimism?

5. Why might Voltaire have chosen to use a euphemism to describe Pangloss having sexual intercourse with the chamber-maid?

Chapter 5

- 1. What does the reaction of each man (Candide, Pangloss, and the sailor) to the earthquake say about his philosophy?

- 2. What types of evil are demonstrated in this chapter, and how do they bolster Voltaire's argument against Optimism?

- 3. What is the purpose of the introduction of the Familiar of the Inquisition?

- 4. How has the setting of the story affected the plot?

Chapter 9

1. What purpose do Don Issachar and the Grand Inquisitor serve in the novel? Explain your answer.

2. How does Candide reason through his murder of the Inquisitor? Does Voltaire seem to share this view?

Chapter 10

1. How does Cunegonde's statement, "Where find Inquisitors or Jews who will give me more," convey that men are also objectified in *Candide*?

2. What is ironic about the reverend Grey Friar stealing Cunegonde's jewels?

3. What does the journey across the sea represent to the travelers, and what are their attitudes toward it?

Chapter 14

1. How does the irony in Cacambo's description of the Paraguayan government affect his characterization?

2. What inequality is illustrated in this chapter, and how does the author illustrate this inequality?

Chapter 15

1. What effect or effects, if any, does the expository material in Chapter 15 have on the text?

2. Why does Candide think he should be allowed to marry Cunegonde? What does this contribute to Candide's development as a character?

Chapter 19

1. What finally causes Candide to renounce Optimism?

2. What implicit argument does the text make concerning European society and the slave trade? Explain your answer.

3. What is Candide most upset by in this chapter? How does this expose his personal moral failings and reveal the target of Voltaire's satirical aim in this chapter?

Chapter 20

1. Explain the differences between Martin's philosophical outlook and Optimism.

2. Compare and contrast Candide and Martin.

3. What might the fifteen-day discussion between Candide and Martin suggest about the nature of philosophy?

